10. AN INTERNSHIP IN COMMUNICATIVE ENGLISH TEACHING

INTRODUCTION

This chapter reports on the genesis, ongoing development, and outcomes of a year-long high school English teacher internship that was established in 2005 at Temple University Japan Campus (TUJ) in Tokyo. The internship was originally created specifically for a veteran high school teacher of English who had been granted a one-year sabbatical by his prefectural school board for the purpose of sharpening his teaching skills in order to implement the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) (2003) mandate that Japanese high school English teachers should teach communicatively and with the goal of making students able to use English for real-world purposes. Based on experience with him, the internship was institutionalized as a regular option at TUJ, through which teachers can learn communicative pedagogy by working as assistants to master teachers in TUJ’s pre-academic language program and participating in a variety of other activities. The chapter narrates how the internship began, what components it included, and how the first intern responded to the experience. The author, who invented the internship and supervised the first intern, relates his thinking during the process of establishing it. Since this teacher, in addition to frequent conferences with the internship supervisor, produced weekly journals during his internship year, the chapter also includes a large amount of material in his voice and in the voice of his internship supervisor, who responded in writing to his journal entries. (To retain the intern’s authentic voice, journal entries are reproduced exactly as they were written, including the original grammar.) The chapter’s focus is on the development of the intern’s identity as a teacher learning new pedagogical methods and as a user of English and on the impact of the internship experience on his teaching after he returned to his school. In conclusion, the chapter also suggests that such internships can make a large positive contribution to the modernization of English language teaching in Japan.

In its (2003) “Course of Study for Foreign Languages,” MEXT has mandated that Japanese students learning English should “develop...basic practical communication abilities such as listening and speaking, deepening the understanding of language and culture, and fostering a positive attitude toward communication through foreign languages” (MEXT, 2003, 1). In addition, MEXT has mandated that English classes should include “[c]ommunicative activities where, for example, students actually
use language to share their feelings and thoughts with each other...”); and in such communicative activities “students should be able to perform language activities where they have to think of how to express themselves in a way appropriate to the specific situation and condition” (MEXT, 2003, 1). (For analysis of what constitutes good learning and teaching, see Matikainen, this volume.)

Most modern language educators familiar with current theories of second language acquisition and of contemporary foreign language pedagogy would applaud the goal of learning a foreign language for practical communication and would agree that lessons should include activities in which students actually use the target language for real communication. However, a number of factors, such as university entrance exams in English that are based on discrete-point, grammar-focused, multiple-choice items, militate against widespread adoption of communicative goals and forms of language pedagogy in high school English classes in Japan. Another major potential source of resistance to both the goals and new styles of pedagogy is the teachers themselves, who may not know how—or may be unwilling—to change their teaching style or feel threatened due to their own imperfect command of the language they are teaching. Nevertheless, in spite of these qualms, many Japanese high school teachers of English do sincerely wish to comply with the MEXT directive in order that their students may develop communicative competence in English. These teachers, who are generally very hard-working and devoted to their students' progress, simply need assistance with learning how to teach communicatively. It is this large group of reform-minded and sincere teachers who are likely to be the ones actually to implement the MEXT mandate, provided they receive the necessary help.

Temple University Japan Campus (TUJ) is well situated to offer training in teaching English for communicative purposes to Japanese teachers of English since it is a full-scale, English-medium university located in Japan. TUJ is a fully accredited branch of Temple University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and has, in addition to various other programs, a well-regarded graduate program in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), offering both doctorates and master's degrees, a four-year undergraduate program offering associate's and bachelor's degrees, and the non-credit-bearing preundergraduate Academic English Program formerly known as the Academic Preparation Program (the APP).

For these reasons and aware of the resources of TUJ, a veteran high school teacher of English in Saitama prefecture and his unusually internationally minded principal approached the author of this chapter, a professor in the TESOL master’s program and then the director of the APP, with the request that the teacher be allowed “to observe classes in the APP for a year.” As the recipient of a year’s sabbatical, he apparently believed that he could best achieve his goals of learning communicative teaching methods and improving his own English through spending his leave year at TUJ. The potential of such an arrangement was immediately obvious, but the APP director suggested that mere observing was not sufficiently interactive and proposed a menu of varied activities that would engage the teacher more actively. These included working as a teaching assistant to APP master teachers, teaching